

Full-Service Medical Treatment in the Deserts of Iraq  
Army Field Hospital Saving Lives of U.S. Soldiers and Iraqis Who Target Them

Jan. 30, 2006 - When there is a medical emergency on the battlefields of Iraq, the rescue often begins with a helicopter touching down at the Army field hospital in the town of Balad, north of Baghdad.

"This is a full-service trauma ER, and we're ready to handle anything that they throw at us," said Army nurse Mike Wallace.

Wallace is part of the medical team that rushes to greet the "birds," the rescue choppers that ferry the wounded.

"I think in the beginning, it's more of a feeling of nervous anticipation," he said. "Sometimes knowing what you have coming off the bird, and sometimes not knowing at all what's going to be coming through the doors."

Many of the injuries the doctors treat are caused by improvised explosive devices.

After a convoy carrying ABC's Bob Woodruff and his cameraman, Doug Vogt, hit an IED in Iraq, they were transported to the hospital in Balad. Doctors credit the immediate treatment received there with saving their lives.

Army National Guard Sgt. Chris Chilles, a substitute teacher from Modesto, Calif., was also in a convoy that was hit by one of the improvised devices.

"Shrapnel came up through my back, and a couple pieces were lodged in and some tore through on my abdomen," he said.

Treating Friend and Foe

Doctors like Tamara McReynolds treat not only the wounded Americans but Iraqis who have attacked American troops.

"Actually, over half of our ward are Iraqi POWs," she said. "You know, it's a difficult situation to be in. But as a physician, we take a Hippocratic oath, and it's our job to take care of people."

Doctors at the Balad hospital have the equipment to do almost any kind of surgery, even limb reattachments. But it's still a war zone; they take mortar fire nearly every day.

"The whole objective is to get them stabilized and then basically move them out as fast as possible," said military doctor John James.

Sick and injured soldiers are loaded on to a large cargo plane for the five-hour flight to the U.S. military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany.

Severely injured soldiers are outfitted with a mobile intensive care unit for the flight - complete with a ventilator and heart monitor.

"This is probably the most rewarding thing that we could possibly do," said Tech. Sgt. Kevin Jones. "This is getting the guys out who need to get out and getting them back home."

After the wounded are loaded off the plane, the medical team heads back to Balad to do it all over again.

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